BRILLIANT CLASSICS
Theodore Kuchar
Dvořák
Shostakovich
Smetana
Nielsen
Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra
National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine

Theodore Kuchar

Antonín Dvořák 1841-1904
Czech Suite Op.39

1.	Praeludium (pastorale)	3’15
2.	Polka	5’11
3.	Sousedska (minuetto)	4’05
4.	Romance (romanza)	4’01
5.	Finale (furiant)	5’17
6.	**My Home Overture Op.62**	8’57
7.	**Husitska Overture Op.67**	12’28
8.	**In Nature´s Realm Overture Op.91**	13’40
9.	**Otello Op.93**	14’08

Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra
Theodore Kuchar *conductor*

Recording: 20-28 August 2004, Ostrava, Czech Republic
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10.	**Symphonic Variations Op.78**	20’26
11.	**Carnival Overture Op.92**	8’47
12.	**Water Goblin Op.107**	20’00
13.	**Noon-Day Witch Op.108**	13’38

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14.	**Golden Spinning Wheel Op.109**	26’11
15.	**Wood Dove Op.110**	20’02
16.	**A Hero´s Song Op.111**	19’44

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Dmitri Shostakovich 1906-1975
Suite for Variety Orchestra No.1 (Jazz Suite No.2)

17.	March	3’04
18.	Dance No.1	2’56
19.	Dance No.2	3’39
20.	Little Polka	2’33
21.	Lyric Waltz	2’38
22.	Waltz No.1	3’21
23.	Waltz No.2	3’34
24.	Finale	2’13
25.	**Overture on Russian and Kirghiz Themes Op.115**	9’19

Jazz Suite No.1

26.	Waltz	2’19
27.	Polka	1’38
28.	Foxtrot	3’47
29.	**Novorossijsk Chimes**	2’32
30.	**Festive Overture Op.96**	5’46

Artist National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine
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The Bolt, Ballet Suite Op.27a

31.	Overture	6’34
32.	Polka	2’36
33.	Variation	1’49
34.	Tango	5’07
35.	Intermezzo	3’50
36.	Finale	3’23

The Limpid Stream, Ballet Suite Op.39a

37.	Waltz	2’23
38.	Russian Lubok	2’30
39.	Galop	1’57
40.	Adagio	7’19
41.	Pizzicato	1’12

The Golden Age, Ballet Suite Op.22a

42.	Overture	3’54
43.	Adagio	8’40
44.	Polka	2’08
45.	Dance	2’10

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Hamlet Suite

46.	Prelude	2’18
47.	The Ball at the Palace	3’41
48.	The Ghost	1’20
49.	In the Garden	3’03
50.	Hamlet & Ophelia	3’51
51.	Arrival of the Actors	2’11
52.	Poisoning Scene	7’26
53.	Duel and Death of Hamlet	3’57

Gadfly, Suite Op.97a

54.	Overture	2’58
55.	Contradance	2’27
56.	Folk Feast	2’38
57.	Interlude	2’49
58.	Waltz “Barrel Organ”	1’54
59.	Galop	1’57
60.	Introduction	6’04
61.	Romance	6’23
62.	Intermezzo	5’32
63.	Nocturne	3’52
64.	Scene	3’21
65.	Finale	3’07

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Bedrich Smetana 1824-1884
Má Vlast (*My Country/Mein Vaterland*)

66.	Vyšehrad	14’51
67.	Vltava (The Moldau)	11’33
68.	Šarka	9’34
69.	From Bohemia’s Meadows and Forests	12’21
70.	Tábor	11’32
71.	Blanik	12’56

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72. **Wallenstein's Camp, Symphonic Poem Op.14** 14'51
73. **Håkon Jarl, Symphonic Poem Op.16** 16'46
74. **Richard III, Symphonic Poem Op.11** 13'05
75. **Overture to "The Bartered Bride"** 6'29

Three Dances from "The Bartered Bride"
76. Polka 5'02
77. Furiant 2'27
78. Skocna (Dance of the Comedians) 5'16

79. **Doktor Faust, Overture to the puppet-play by Matej Kopecký** 4'20
80. **Venkovanka, The Peasant Woman, Polka** 4'07
81. **Nasim Devam, To our Girls, Polka** 4'06

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Festive Symphony in E Op.6
82. Allegro vivace 11'13
83. Largo maestoso 11'04
84. Scherzo, allegro vivace 11'38
85. Finale, allegro non troppo ma energico 11'36
86. **Festive Overture in C** 2'58
87. **Festive Overture in D Op.4** 8'59
88. **Prague Carnival, Introduction & Polonaise** 6'21
89. **March of the National Guard** 4'50
90. **Shakespeare Festival March Op.20** 6'31

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Carl Nielsen 1865-1931
Symphony No.1 in G Minor Op.7
91. Allegro orgoglioso 9'10
92. Andante 8'08
93. Allegro comodo 7'42
94. Finale, allegro con fuoco 8'11

Symphony No.2 Op.16 "The Four Temperaments"
95. Allegro collerico 8'47
96. Allegro comodo e flemmatico 4'19
97. Andante malincolico 12'17
98. Allegro sanguinoso 6'43

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Theodore Kuchar *conductor*

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Symphony No.3 Op.27 "Sinfonia espansiva"
99. Allegro espansivo 11'19
100. Andante pastorale 9'41
101. Allegretto un poco 6'33
102. Finale, allegro 9'16

Symphony No.4 Op.29 "The Inextinguishable"
103. Allegro 11'08
104. Poco allegretto 4'31
105. Poco adagio quasi andante 9'34
106. Allegro 8'47

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Symphony No.5 Op.50
107. Tempo giusto 18'21
108. Allegro 16'19

Symphony No.6 "Sinfonia semplice"
109. Tempo giusto 13'40
110. Humoreske, allegretto 4'05
111. Proposta seria, adagio 6'07
112. Theme & variations 10'56

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José Pablo Moncayo 1912–1958
113. **Huapango** 8'11

Arturo Márquez b.1950
114. **Danzón No.2** 9'26

Aldemaro Romero 1928–2007
115. **Tocatta Bachiana y Pajarillo Aldemaroso** 9'21

Silvestre Revueltas 1899–1940
116. **Janitzio** 7'32

Alberto Ginastera 1916–1983
Four Dances from Estancia
117. Los trabajadores agrícolas 2'57
118. Danza del trigo 3'02
119. Los peones de hacienda 1'58
120. Danza final (malambo) 3'41

Yuri Hung b.1968
121. **Kanaima** 4'47

Oscar Lorenzo Fernández 1897–1948
122. **Batuque** 4'09

Orquesta Sinfónica de Venezuela
Theodore Kuchar *conductor*

Recording: July 2011
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The conductor Theodore Kuchar quite literally learnt his repertoire at the feet of Lorin Maazel. Born in 1963 to Ukrainian émigré parents, he remembers the first time he was taken to a symphony concert in his home city of Cleveland, Ohio. 'The cheapest seats in Severance Hall were the front two rows. Rudolf Serkin was going to play Brahms's Second Piano Concerto. And on the drive into the city, my mother said to us, 'Teddy, Andrew, Mr Serkin hums. He sings while he plays. Don't react.'"

Kuchar's mother had worked with Serkin as a pianist at the Marlboro Festival in the 1950s. Her sons evidently heeded her strictures, because Kuchar and his brother were taken every Saturday night during Maazel's Cleveland years as Music Director (1972-82). As a teenager, his energies found their outlet on the sports field, but the cultural exposure gradually paid off. 'Those things that we rebel against the most in our early years leave a strong subconscious impression upon us. It came to a point when I was 16 or 17 that I didn't only like sports,' he remembers. 'I began to like money. I was delivering papers every morning, I was shovelling driveways, anything to earn money so that I could buy classical recordings from Record Theatre in Cleveland. It became a great compulsion with me.

'But I didn't buy a lot of different things,' continues Kuchar. 'I would buy six or seven recordings of the same work. I was more fascinated by the differences between them than ordering everything off the menu, as it were. When my parents went grocery shopping once a week, and the best record shop in town was next door, that's how I used to kill an hour or two after my three-hour morning rehearsal with the youth orchestra. In the last two years of high school I bought a student subscription to the Cleveland Orchestra, and I went every Friday night.'

Kuchar's practical training began as a violinist. At the age of 17, he switched to the viola: an astute move for a young musician looking to get on in an oversubscribed profession. But sports and music continued to exert a joint pull. 'I was the pitcher on the baseball team and the quarterback in the football team, and I guess a parallel in an orchestral context is to be the conductor. I pleaded with my parents to go to conducting classes and summer schools, and my mother replied: "You want to be a conductor? Go to your room and practise the viola!"

As leader of the violas in the Fellowship Orchestra at the Tanglewood Music School outside Boston, Kuchar was encouraged by Sir Colin Davis, among others, and Gunther Schuller, who led the orchestra in a programme of Brahms's Fourth Symphony and Ibert's *Escales*. '*Escales* was a party piece 50 years ago,' says Kuchar, 'but it has fallen out of favour since then. The way Schuller picked that piece apart, and rehearsed it, is one of the greatest lessons in orchestral management I've ever witnessed. He was no Maazel or Mehta but it was absolutely wonderful.'

Kuchar left Cleveland in 1986 and went to Finland to play principal viola for the Helsinki Opera: 'not to earn more money or because Helsinki was a better musical environment but because I wanted to be a conductor.' Rather than negotiating a higher salary, Kuchar arranged for conducting opportunities. By the end of his first year in Helsinki, he had conducted around 50 performances at the Finnish National Opera and Ballet, working with conductors such as Gennady Rozhdestvensky on Prokofiev's *Maddalena* and *Rothschild's Violin* by Fleischmann. He remembers it as 'a golden age of orchestral playing. And at that time the orchestra had a lot of Russians who had come from Leningrad, as it was then. It was a fantastic education that no institution or doctorate could ever give you.'

It was an education shared by the likes of former cellists Barbirolli and Toscanini, and by Carlo Maria Giulini, who played under Toscanini as a violist in the Augusteo Orchestra in Rome. They knew what Kuchar knows: 'Being an orchestral musician is the greatest education that a young conductor can have. I have seen so many people study conducting – they even do their doctorates in it. But some of them have never played an orchestral instrument or sat in an orchestra. No matter how often you stand in front of two pianos waving your hands, none of that can replicate the experience of having sat on the first desk of a good orchestra. I played with a lot of conductors in my previous life as a violist – some great, some not so great. And I had a lot of good luck.

Kuchar secured his first musical directorship in Australia at the age of 26, with the Queensland Philharmonic Orchestra in Brisbane. 'By then I had Lorin Maazel coming out of my pores,' he says. 'He was my idol, and he remains my idol. When conducting students come to me, and we discuss the mechanics, the technique of the hands and so on, I compare it to a good baseball swing or a golf stroke. A good conducting technique can also be compared to a bow arm. You don't have three joints, a shoulder, an elbow and a wrist, all flip-flopping like a duck in water. There's one principal joint used for different motions. Everything I learnt about a good bow arm as a violist applies to the mechanics of conducting. The two people who exemplify this were Maazel, who was master of the wrist technique, in the style of Carl Flesch's violin school, and Zubin Mehta, who uses a large forearm, or the shoulder with the elbow remaining steady – that's more like the Ivan Galamian violin school where the wrist remains an extension of the entire forearm.'

The collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s worked in Kuchar's favour. 'Every major arts institution lost their principal sponsor: the state. So they were all looking for connections to the West, to their diaspora. It was a period when a lot of emigrants such as my parents, who had gone to the US and succeeded as doctors, lawyers, in other professions, felt an obligation to return to Ukraine and help the country get back on its feet.'

Kuchar's name came up in several conversations with cultural apparatchiks and politicians, and in 1992 he became Principal Guest Conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine, then Artistic Director two years later. Having given hundreds of concerts with the orchestra, and taken it on many international tours, he is now the orchestra's Conductor Laureate for Life. He has also guest conducted countless orchestras around the world: we spoke during his rehearsals for a new production of Stravinsky's *Pulcinella* and *Le sacre du printemps* in Kiev. The previous week he had been working with an orchestra in Buenos Aires. Once the run of Stravinsky was done, he would fly to London for an instrument auction: the life of a modern maestro.

Having led orchestras across the world, Kuchar can speak with some authority about a conductor's aspirations and obligations. 'I think this is the single most important quality a conductor should have: whatever level the orchestra is at when you first meet them, whether they're a community orchestra or the Cleveland Orchestra, you should be able to raise their level. To do that, you have to be a great teacher and a great psychologist. You have to be able to make musicians work for you like a great coach or an entrepreneur gets their team working for them. And if you're a good teacher you're one step ahead of your strongest critic in the orchestra.'

Kuchar observes how the music in this set belongs at a visceral level to the three featured orchestras, based in Kiev, Ostrava and Caracas respectively. In the case of the theatre music by Shostakovich, he says, 'I could never get a Czech or Slovak orchestra to play like that. When I was making those recordings in Kiev, there were still people who played in the 50s and 60s who remember seeing Shostakovich, who lived through those appalling times. No one ever looked at him other than as an extension of a life they were living – and not a pretty life, a memory which abides today, of great punishment and oppression. I like a level of *fortissimo* in the brass at times which makes the floor shake beneath you, because you stop listening to the music and you begin to understand the message behind it.'

And what would that message be? Kuchar takes a typically nuanced view. 'I don't like to say that the 'true' Shostakovich was either the composer of the Fourth Symphony or the composer of entertainment music such as *The Bolt*. Every one of the composers in this box changed their style during their career. Shostakovich changed his style for different reason than Dvořák did. But the crisis of the Fourth brought about the success of the Fifth. Despite the success of the First Symphony, he wrote a lot of music in his early period which won't survive the test of time. The Second and Third Symphonies will never be more than what they are – whereas The Bolt is absolutely genius. I learnt it from a Rozhdestvensky recording on a Melodiya LP, and I just flipped out. A colleague of mine in the Helsinki Philharmonic said to me,

"Teddy, this is your piece. You're going to take this and you're going to have people wetting their pants over it." And who would have thought, that, 20 years after the fact, it would have turned out that way!'

The set's 'ugly duckling' in this context is the complete set of Nielsen symphonies, which were not in the repertoire of the Janacek Philharmonic when Kuchar made these recordings, unlike the music of Smetana and Dvorak. However, the conductor notes, 'the Janacek Phil is a highly adaptable orchestra, a musical machine which follows its instructions very well in everything from Viennese classics to music of the present day. I brought my own parts from my Helsinki days. And I felt it was Germanic enough that it wouldn't pose issues – the orchestra plays Brahms and Smetana very well, then Janacek and Martinu. And this all feeds into Nielsen. Their musical evolution was not so different to each other.

'I talk to orchestras about Sibelius's symphonic development,' continues Kuchar, 'the way he moves in style from Coca-Cola to mineral water. I think you can say the same thing about Nielsen. The most honest thing you can do is to play it by the book and do what's written. One review site [*Classics Today*] said it was the best Nielsen cycle going – who would have predicted that from an orchestra who'd never played this music before?'

Having made hundreds of recordings of a huge range of repertoire, Kuchar takes the process seriously. 'A recording is like an encyclopedia entry. It's for people who will listen to what you have done and then make their own decisions. It's an artistic imperative that when you're given the privilege of recording something, you try to come as close as possible to the intentions of the composer.'

The temptation to edit, to amend and alter may be felt especially keenly with the early orchestral works of Smetana such as the Festive Symphony. As Kuchar observes, 'some people would just play it as fast as they can and get it over with. That doesn't help. You take what you have and you make the most of it. It's not for me as a conductor to decide that this or that passage is nonsense and leave it out. I had heard some older Czech recordings which were heavily cut, but the parts we had were complete, and I think to understand the greatness of *Má Vlast*, you have to look at some of these earlier pieces and understand his comparatively modest beginnings. And perhaps in the celebrations of 'Blaník' you can hear them. Even in *Wallenstein's Camp* you hear where the Festive Symphony came from and went – and it makes you appreciate Dvořák all the more!'

Talking of Dvořák, Kuchar confesses to a particular fondness for the symphonic poems inspired by the gruesomely vivid ballads of Erben such as *The Wood Dove*, as well as misleadingly opus-numbered works such as the Op.78 Symphonic Variations which belong to a much earlier period in Dvořák's long career. 'The symphonic poems have had to wait in line for too long,' he says. 'When Dvořák returned home for the final years of his life, his idiom changed completely. It has nothing to do with the "American" period before it. These poems are so touching, without any of the post-Tchaikovsky adrenaline in the later symphonies. What's uppermost is a heart-wrenching introversion, with an emotional impact no less intense than the extroversion of the symphonies. The Eighth and Ninth symphonies, they go, they work – but the later music is much harder to pull off.' Kuchar's enthusiasm is infectious, as audiences from Kiev to Caracas have discovered over the course of three decades, and his own appetite for musical discoveries, for living and learning, is apparently insatiable.

© *Peter Quantrill*

The multiple award-winning conductor **Theodore Kuchar** is the most recorded conductor of his generation and appears on over 130 compact discs for the Naxos, Brilliant Classics, Ondine, Marco Polo and Toccata Classics labels. He has served as the Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of two of Europe's leading orchestras, the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine and the Janacek Philharmonic Orchestra (formerly the Czech Radio Orchestra) while also serving as the Principal Conductor of the Slovak National Symphony Orchestra, Ukrainian Festival Orchestra and Slovak Sinfonietta. In the 2011-12 season he commenced his tenure as the Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Orquesta Sinfonica de Venezuela and prior to that served as the Music Director and Principal Conductor of the Queensland Philharmonic Orchestra in Brisbane, Australia. In addition to his conducting activities he has served as the Artistic Director of two of the world's most important chamber music festivals, The Australian Festival of Chamber Music (1991-2007) and the Nevada Chamber Music Festival (2003-2018).

Mr. Kuchar's longest titled affiliation and relationship is with the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine, of which he was appointed the Artistic Director and Principal Conductor in 1994. They have appeared together in over 300 performances, in Kyiv and on tour on four continents while their discography totals over 80 compact discs. Most recently, they completed a 44-concert tour of North America under the auspices of Columbia Artists Management in January-March, 2017.

Conducting engagements during the 2018-19 season include the major orchestras and opera houses of Ankara, Antalya, Bayreuth, Beijing, Buenos Aires, Cape Town, Cardiff, Helsingborg, Helsinki, Istanbul, Kharkiv, Kyiv, Prague and Weimar among others. He has collaborated with major artists including Itzhak Perlman, Yo-Yo Ma, Sarah Chang, Mstislav Rostropovich, Joshua Bell, James Galway, Shlomo Mintz, Jessye Norman, Lynn Harrell, Robert Levin and Frederica von Stade, among others. Among Mr. Kuchar's numerous accolades include BBC Record of the Year, Australian Broadcasting Corporation Record of the Year, Chamber Music America Record of the Year, Gramophone Magazine's Editor's Choice, the WQXR Record of the Year and several Grammy Award nominations.